

CLAIMS

1. Method for ensuring the availability of a service proposed by a service provider in a data transmission system including at least one user workstation connected to the Internet network, a plurality of content servers able to furnish services provided by service providers in response to service requests from said user workstation, and a proxy server interconnected between said Internet network and said content servers for receiving said service requests from said user workstation and transmitting each one to a content server able to provide the requested service;
said method including the following steps when said proxy server receives a service request,
 - looking in a context table for an entry corresponding to a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) defined in said service request in order to determine the content server able to provide the requested service,
 - appending a service availability request to said service request before sending said service request from said proxy server to said determined content server,
 - appending a service availability token to the reply provided by said determined content server before sending said reply from said determined content server to said proxy server,
 - removing said service availability token from said reply upon reception thereof by said proxy server, and
 - updating said context table in said proxy server before sending said reply to said user workstation by using information contained in said service availability token.
2. Method according to claim 1, wherein said context table includes several entries corresponding to several URLs associated with a same server name.

3. Method according to claim 2, wherein said context table contains as a parameter for each entry an "availability" of the associated URL which is a percentage of availability or "not available."
- 5 4. Method according to claim 3, wherein said service request is rejected if the parameter "availability" in said context table is defined as not available.
- 10 5. Method according to claim 4, wherein said context table includes multiple entries for the same server name, the entry with the parameter "availability" being the highest one selected in the step of looking for an entry.
- 15 6. Method according to claim 5, wherein said context table contains several parameters associated with said service availability request being sent which are updated when said service availability request is sent from said proxy server to said content server.
- 20 7. Method according to claim 6, further comprising the step of refreshing the entry of said context table by taking into account variables which are a function of parameters included in said context table.
8. Method according to claim 7, wherein the parameter "availability" of said context table is set to "not available" when said number of retries is equal to a predetermined maximum number.
- 25 9. Method according to claim 8, wherein said service request is written in HyperText Markup Language (HTML) and said service availability request is contained in a header of said HTTP service request.

10. Method according to claim 9, wherein said service availability token is in Extensible Markup Language (XML) format.
- 5 11. Method according to claim 10, wherein said context table is updated when receiving said service availability token from said content server, and the parameter "availability" is changed if necessary.
12. System comprising means adapted for implementing the steps of the method according to claim 1.